

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7963

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA IMMEDIATE

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AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 14482

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SEATO, TH

SUBJECT: FUTURE OF SEATO

REF: BANGKOK 14368

SUMMARY: P.M. KHUKRIT'S FORTHCOMING VISIT TO MANILA HAS FOCUSED INTEREST ON SEATO'S FUTURE AS ONE OF THE TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION BETWEEN RTG AND PHILIPPINES. THE THAI MFA BRIEFING PAPER FOR KHUKRIT BASICALLY RECOMMENDS THE CONTINUATION OF SEATO IN ITS PRESENT STATUS, AT LEAST FOR THE SHORT TERM, WITH EMPHASIS ON ITS ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES. WHAT EMERGES FROM TALKS BETWEEN P.M. KHUKRIT AND PRESIDENT MARCOS ON THE SUBJECT OF SEATO SHOULD PROVIDE A GOOD INDICATION OF SEATO'S LONGEVITY AND THE BASIS FOR MEANINGFUL CONSIDERATION AT THE TWENTIETH COUNCIL MEETING IN NEW YORK THIS FALL. WE BELIEVE THE MOST LIKELY RESULT WILL BE AN ASIAN DECISION TO LET SEATO POLITELY DRIFT AWAY RATHER THAN ABRUPTLY DISSOLVE ITS
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PRESENT REDUCED PROFILE. END SUMMARY.

1. PRESS ATTENTION HAS CENTERED ON SEATO'S FUTURE SINCE THIS WILL BE AMONG THE POINTS FOR DISCUSSION DURING PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT'S VISIT WITH PRESIDENT MARCOS COMMENCING JULY 21. MOST WOULD AGREE THAT THE ORGANIZATION HAS LOST ITS ORIGINAL PURPOSE WITH THE PASSAGE OF TIME AND CHANGING EVENTS IN ASIA. YET, SEATO, HAS DRAWN VERY LITTLE CRITICISM FROM THE ASIAN COMMUNISTS AND IN ITS PRIMARY ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ROLE PRESENTS NO THREAT

2. THE RTG OFFICIAL CHARGED WITH PREPARING BRIEFING PAPERS FROM THE MANILA VISIT BELIEVES SEATO SHOULD BE RETAINED FOR THE TIME BEING AND THAT, APART FROM ITS SMALL ECONOMIC ACTIVITY, IT REMAINS AN ELEMENT TO BE CONSIDERED IN THE BALANCE OF POWER IN ASIA. IN HIS VIEW, SEATO STILL REFLECTS A CERTAIN SYMBOLIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION IN THE THAI DOMESTIC CONTEXT WHICH, IF ABRUPTLY DISSOLVED, WOULD CREATE A SENSE OF DISQUIET. HE SAID THIS WAS NOT THE TIME FOR DISBANDING SEATO, FOR THE THAI PEOPLE WOULD THINK THE GOVERNMENT WAS MOVING TOO FAST IN MAKING NEW APPROACHES TO COMMUNIST GOVERNMENTS WHILE, AT THE SAME TIME, CUTTING ITS TIES WITH OLD FRIENDS. MOREOVER, THERE WAS NO PRESSURE TO WITHDRAW FROM SEATO AND, THEREFORE, NO ADVANTAGE IN DOING SO AT THE PRESENT TIME. HE ALSO REFLECTED RTG CONCERN OVER ADDRESSING AND DISCARDING THE MANILA PACT AT THIS JUNCTURE.

3. THE THAI OFFICIAL HOPED THE PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT WOULD SHARE THIS VIEW. HE BELIEVED THE SUBJECT OF SEATO HAD TO BE ADDRESSED BY THE TWO REGIONAL MEMBERS AND HE CONSIDERED THE RESULTS WOULD PROVIDE A BASIS FOR USEFUL SUBSTANTIVE TALKS AMONG THE FOREIGN MINISTERS AT THE NEW YORK MEETING OF THE TWENTIETH COUNCIL AND ADDED THAT THE RTG WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO PARTICIPATING IN COUNCIL MEETING.

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4. COMMENT: THE MFA APPEARS TO BE TAKING A BALANCED OBJECTIVE LOOK AT SEATO TAKING INTO ACCOUNT RTG INTERESTS. MFA VIEWS PROBABLY COINCIDE WITH THOSE OF PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT. WE JUDGE THAT IF THE THAI VIEW PREVAILS, THE FUTURE OF SEATO WILL PROBABLY BE A TYPICALLY ASIAN SOLUTION BASED ON A GRADUAL WITHERING AWAY RATHER THAN AN IMMEDIATE TERMINATION.

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